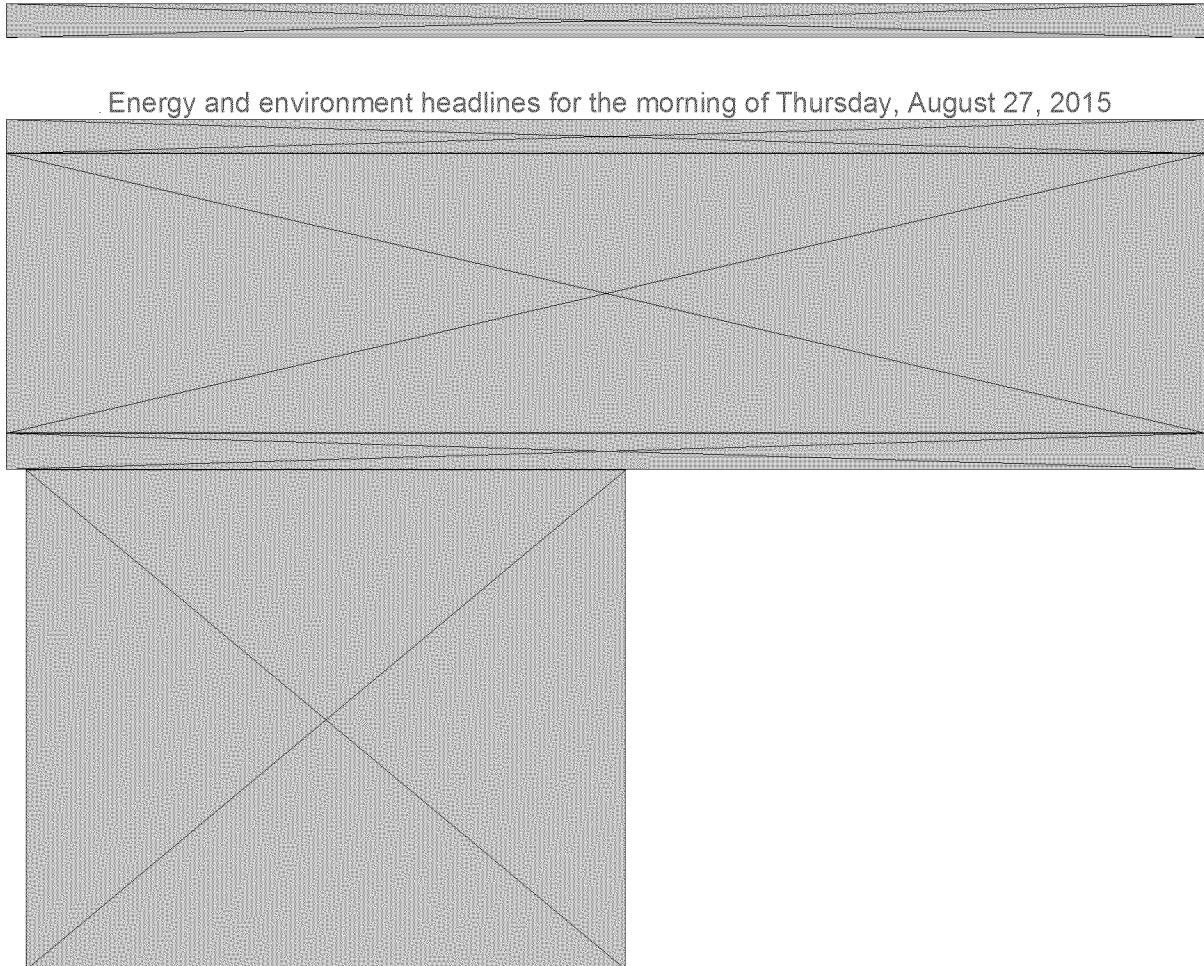


To: Grantham, Nancy[Grantham.Nancy@epa.gov]
From: EnergyGuardian
Sent: Thur 8/27/2015 4:36:11 PM
Subject: Investigation: EPA, state missed potential for mine blowout

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"Investigation": EPA, state missed potential for mine blowout

By Matthew Brown

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Republicans say they're not satisfied with a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency claim that a 3-million-gallon toxic spill from an inactive gold mine was likely "inevitable," even though there had been prior warnings that such a spill could occur.

An EPA internal investigation determined federal and state regulators mistakenly concluded water pressure inside the mine near Silverton was not high enough to cause an accident.

That turned out to be wrong. The pressure blew on August 5 when a government cleanup team started excavation and cleanup work on the site. The accident sent a torrent of poisoned mine water into rivers in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and on the Navajo Nation.

A report summarizing the investigation appeared to minimize the agency's responsibility, with the suggestion that a blowout likely could not have been avoided.

The Associated Press reported Saturday that EPA managers knew that a release of "large volumes of contaminated mine waters" was a possibility as early as June, 2014. The concerns about a large spill were repeated in a May work plan from an agency contractor, Environmental Restoration.

Yet officials drew up only a cursory spill response plan and appeared to take few extra precautions when working at the mine site this summer.

"This new report cannot excuse their liability in causing the spill and the negative impact it is having downstream," U.S. Sen. John Barrasso said in response to EPA investigation. "The EPA will have to explain to the American people how this happened."

Barrasso, a Wyoming Republican who chairs the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, has scheduled a September 16 hearing on the Gold King Mine spill. It's one of a series of hearings on the accident planned by Republicans once Congress returns from its August recess.

In the report released Wednesday, EPA officials also faulted procedures that left personnel largely unprepared for the spill and recommended changes to avoid a repeat of the accident.

Other investigations are pending from the EPA's Inspector General and the U.S. Interior Department. But Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman said an outside review "is a must."

"I don't trust the EPA of this administration to investigate itself," said Coffman, a Republican. "It would never have allowed BP to investigate the Deepwater Horizon oil spill."

A spokeswoman for Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper said the Democrat would be briefed on the EPA investigation after it was reviewed by Natural Resources staff. Spokeswoman Kathy Green declined further comment.

The toxic sludge released from the mine prompted the shutdown of some public drinking water and irrigation systems and tainted hundreds of miles of rivers.

Some farmers on the Navajo Nation who draw water from one of the affected rivers, the San Juan, want to keep irrigation systems shut down for at least a year to avoid contaminated sediments that experts say likely settled onto river bottoms.

EPA Deputy Administrator Stan Meiburg said on a Wednesday conference call that underestimating the water pressure inside the mine workings "was likely the most significant factor relating to the blowout."

The internal investigation revealed that regulators could have drilled into the mine to get a better gauge on how much pressure had built up. That didn't happen.

"This procedure may have been able to discover the pressurized conditions that turned out to cause the blowout," the investigation report said.

However, Meiburg said there was "no evidence to suggest this technique would be necessary," and other factors indicated there was little or no pressure inside the mine.

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Upcoming Events

Aq secretary promises more sage grouse spending across West

By Matthew Brown

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — The federal government plans to spend more than \$200 million over the next three years on programs to protect greater sage grouse in Western states — regardless of whether the bird receives federal protections, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said.

Vilsack told The Associated Press that he wants to almost double protected habitat for the chicken-sized bird, to 8 million acres by 2018. He also promised more spending on conservation easements for private landowners, to limit residential development in sage grouse habitat and to restore wetlands used by the birds.

A formal announcement was planned for Thursday during an event in Portland, Oregon.

It's part of an ongoing campaign by the Obama administration to demonstrate its commitment to staving off further declines in grouse populations.

More

Obama says New Orleans is 'moving forward' after hurricane

By Darlene Superville

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama says New Orleans is "moving forward" a decade after Hurricane Katrina dealt it a devastating blow, and has become an example of what can happen when people rally around each other to build a better future out of the despair of tragedy.

Obama was marking the storm's 10th anniversary by meeting Thursday with residents who continue to rebuild their lives and communities. He was also delivering remarks -- excerpts of which were released by the White House -- at a newly opened community center in the

Lower 9th Ward, a largely African-American neighborhood that was one of the hardest hit by the storm. It is still struggling to recover.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Obama would also stress that the federal government and communities need to start investing in "resilience" so that they will be ready for the more intense storms and wildfires that a warming planet will bring.

"There's no denying what scientists tell us, which is that there's reason to be concerned about these storms getting worse and more violent," he told reporters Wednesday.

More

Official: Californians understanding need to conserve water

By Scott Smith

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — State officials say that water conservation figures for July show California residents are beginning to understand the dire need to cut back in a fourth year of drought.

Felicia Marcus, chair of the State Water Resources Control Board, said that regulators are now turning their focus to the communities failing to conserve. They are making personal visits with local officials in cities that have haven't responded to a mandate by Gov. Jerry Brown's to use 25 percent less water.

"It's hands on," Marcus said. "We're in a crisis."

The state water board on Thursday is expected to release water conservation figures for July, revealing how each community is performing.

More

Fire crews battle smoky conditions, flames in Washington

By Nicholas K. Geranios

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Smoke from big wildfires burning east of the Cascade Range hurt air quality Wednesday and hampered efforts by crews battling the flames in Washington state.

Smoky conditions grounded helicopters and airplanes that had been fighting the fires, and air quality was rated as unhealthy for some people in Spokane County, which has nearly

500,000 residents.

Crews battling a 262-square mile blaze near the town of Republic were also battling smoke as well as flames, fire spokesman Donnie Davis said.

"Everybody up here is rubbing their eyes," Davis said. "It's brutal."

More

IAEA reports Iran broadly complying with nuclear accords

By Bradley Klapper

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran is broadly complying with agreements on curtailing its nuclear program, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported Thursday in its first update since last month's deal between Tehran and world powers. It noted concern, however, with an Iranian military site where nuclear weapons work may have occurred more than a decade ago.

The U.N. agency said Iran's current level of uranium enrichment, nuclear research and development and other activity is in line with its declarations. The 21-page report covers Iran's nuclear program in the run-up to the landmark accord on July 14 and its first steps toward implementing that agreement. A copy of the document was obtained by The Associated Press.

The agency noted that it received information from Iran about allegations of past nuclear weapons work on Aug. 15.

But it offered reservations about the military base of Parchin. Western intelligence agencies say Iran used the site for explosives tests and other experiments related to the development of nuclear weapons. Iran argues the evidence is fraudulent; the IAEA is supposed to clear up the allegations by mid-December.

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A message from the American Petroleum Institute

America is now the world's #1 natural gas producer and will soon be #1 in oil. Now more than ever, abundant energy means abundant prosperity, opportunity and security for all Americans.

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Kazakhstan to host international energy summit bank

By The Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The International Atomic Energy Agency and Kazakhstan have signed an agreement to establish a low-enriched uranium bank in the Central Asian country, a move that supporters say could reduce concerns about nuclear weapons proliferation.

An IAEA statement on Thursday said the bank will be able to hold up to 90 tons of low-enriched uranium, which would be available to IAEA member states if they're unable to obtain nuclear fuel on the commercial market.

Low-enriched uranium is used in reactors at nuclear power plants. Nuclear weapons use uranium enriched to a higher level.

Advocates believe that making the supply of nuclear fuel more reliable could discourage countries from developing their own enrichment facilities, which could be used to make weapons-grade material.

Ecuador's president says country now producing oil at a loss

By Maria Jose Sanchez

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — Ecuadoreans are already contending with a rumbling, ash-spewing volcano and rising living costs because they use the appreciating U.S. dollar as their currency.

Now they've been told that Ecuador's oil — its principal export and a vital source of government funding — costs more to produce than it earns.

President Rafael Correa explained on Tuesday, during a visit to areas threatened by the Cotopaxi volcano, that it costs the OPEC nation \$39 to produce a barrel of oil for which it only receives \$30.

If crude prices remain below \$40 that could mean more budget cuts or higher taxes.

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EPA water rule to take effect Friday

Unless the courts intervene at the 11th hour, the Environmental Protection Agency's new Clean Water rule is due to be implemented Friday, Forbes reports.

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Native Americans greet Obama with push for Alaska energy development

A 30-second television ad highlighting the importance of energy development in Alaska is running in markets throughout the state ahead of President Obama's visit set for Monday, paid for by the Arctic Slope Regional Corp., which hold North Slope drilling rights and represents around 12,000 native Alaskans, FuelFix reports.

More

Fallin pushes Keystone, crude exports in Oklahoma speech

Delivering the keynote address at an energy expo in Tulsa Wednesday, Gov. Mary Fallin, R-Okla., called for a strong national energy policy that includes construction of the Keystone XL pipeline and the lifting of the U.S. ban on crude exports, the Tulsa World reports.

More

EPA handling of fracking waste to draw green lawsuit

Seven groups -- including the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Integrity Project -- gave notice Wednesday that they intend to sue the Environmental Protection Agency for failing to update the regulations that govern the handling of drilling waste, E&E reports.

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Business groups ramp up campaign against ozone regs

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers have been turning up the volume in their attacks on the Environmental Protection Agency's potential moves to lower ozone limits in the atmosphere, National Journal reports.

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Oil discoveries threatened by drillers' belt tightening

Smaller drilling companies around the world are putting exploration plans on hold as they take steps to cut costs in the face of falling oil prices, which could mean a big drop in future discoveries of deposits, The Wall Street Journal reports.

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Ethanol production down but stockpiles higher

The Energy Information Administration says U.S. ethanol production has dropped to May levels at 952,000 barrels a day, although stockpiles increased for a second straight week to 18.628

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million barrels, Platts reports.

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Oil skyrockets on stock market rally

Gains in global stock markets alongside a pipeline shutdown in Nigeria sent oil prices soaring Thursday. U.S. benchmark crude jumped \$2.93 a barrel to \$41.55 on the Nymex, while in London Brent rose \$3 a barrel to \$46.32, The Financial Times reports.

More

Fed royalties could soar on slashed venting and flaring: Watchdog groups

If the Bureau of Land Management imposed new rules that cut down on natural gas venting and flaring on federal lands, taxpayers could get millions more in royalty payments, according to ads being run by the Western Values Project and Taxpayers for Common Sense, The Hill reports.

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NASA sees sea level rise accelerating

NASA is warning that ocean levels may rise three feet or more by the end of the century, with scientists attributing the change to melting glaciers, melting ice sheets and ocean expansion due to climate change, the Los Angeles Times reports.

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Upcoming Events

- Aug. 27, Seattle: The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold a field hearing in Seattle to receive testimony on opportunities to improve the organizational response of federal agencies in the management of wildland fires. Ranking member Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., to deliver opening remarks. 11:30 am , Seattle University's Campion Hall - 914 East Jefferson Street - Seattle, WA 98122

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